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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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WATERFOWL FLIGHTS HINGE ON SUMMER RAINS, INTERIOR OFFICIAL SAYS

The 1960 waterfowl situation in North America is not yet clear and no definite estimate of the size and character of the fall flights can be made until after the breeding grounds surveys are completed in late July.

Thus did a Department of the Interior spokesman, Lansing A. Parker, Assistant Director of the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife, summarize the matter this week before the annual meeting of the Western Association of State Game and Fish Commissioners at Salt Lake City.

Mr. Parker said that precarious water conditions in the pothole region where most of the ducks are raised is the reason for the uncertainty. During the spring generally there has been considerably more water in the pothole area than last year. As a result, compared to last year, nesting activity has increased this year. While there is much more water on the prairies, many of the ponds are shallow and evaporation is already taking its toll. Unless there are rains in the near future sufficiently heavy to produce run-off, broods now hatching will not have enough water on which to mature. Since questionable water conditions exist on two thirds of the breeding habitat it is not possible to be optimistic at this time.

The breeding population surveys which the Bureau makes each year have been completed except for the Far North. The population index is down 19 percent from last year. The decrease in northern Alberta and part of the Northwest Territories was 46 percent, in southern Alberta 13 percent, and in Minnesota 43 percent. In Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario there was essentially no change in the size of the breeding population as compared with 1959. A substantial increase was noted in the Dakotas. There are still two crews in the field, one in Alaska and the other in northern Northwest Territories. Reports from those crews are expected soon.

The Bureau will have waterfowl specialists in the field during July and August to determine the results of the nesting season. The findings of the breeding grounds surveys plus all other available information will be used in the determination of this fall's hunting regulations.

Mr. Parker described the methods used in promulgating hunting regulations. He explained that the Administrative Procedures Act of 1946 requires that a 30-day public notice be given on regulations which have the force and effect of law. This results in a tight schedule, with nesting success information arriving barely in time for analysis and for preparation of recommendations to the Secretary on bag limits, shooting times and other pertinent points. He emphasized that no one in the Department of the Interior has any preconceived ideas of what the regulations should be until the breeding grounds data are analyzed and properly considered, along with the winter survey data, kill data, flyway reports and data from many other sources.

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